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ABSTRACT

Arguing that professional library literature often ignores the problem of evaluating the effectiveness of a library tour or the aids (e.g., audiotape, slides, video, computer programs, handbooks) which may supplement the tour, this article provides a proposed evaluation model for measuring a tour's success. The evaluation of library tours is compared to formal course evaluations, and it is suggested that the critical scrutiny of the tours may serve to justify the faculty status of librarians. It is noted that a focused tour objective which identifies the tour's audience, behavior, conditions under which the current behavior exists, and measures performance is integral to the design of the survey instrument. The University of Nevada-Reno's evaluation form for library instruction is included and three charts provide evaluation results for 1985-1989. (MAB)

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Evaluation of Library Tours

by

Michael Simons

Abstract: This article reviews the process of evaluating library tours. Evaluating library tours is compared to the process of evaluating classroom instruction. To gather data on the value of a library tour a survey instrument is designed. Data collected over the past five years is examined.

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Evaluation of Library Tours

The staff of most academic libraries provide building tours to their students and faculty. A library tour is frequently the first impression potential users get of a library, and as such this impression should be a positive one. Often these tours are integrated into the library's overall bibliographic instruction program. Some tours are designed to provide a brief orientation to where key service points are located; others may offer more in-depth explanations of reference tools. Library tours may be guided, by a library staff member; self-guided via handouts, audio tapes, or media (slide-tape, video, etc.); or interactive with computers.

PROBLEM WITH LIBRARY TOURS

Upon conducting a library tour what has been accomplished? Library tours have been described by librarians as "ghastly, deadly, herded, or an amorphous mass[1]." Librarians provide tours to a wide variety of groups, some of whom have a very limited understanding of what library resources and services are. The process of conducting a guided library tour is time intensive for library staff. Given the large investment of staff time to such activities it should be reasonable to expect some sort of positive outcome. Is there any way of documenting the outcome of a library tour? If a library can

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document the outcomes of tours then the relative success of the such activities can be measured. The problem becomes trying to devise a mechanism for measuring what has gone on in a library tour.

LITERATURE ON LIBRARY TOURS

Searching library literature for information on library tours is a complicated process. Many library tours are included as part of the library's bibliographic instruction program. For example, Library Literature provides a cross-reference from "library tours" to "bibliographic instruction; study tours." There are any number of articles and books that chronicle how libraries conduct bibliographic instruction, but few give in-depth discussions of library tours. [For someone wanting to examine various types of library tours, Mary Jo Lynch's "Library Tours: The First Step[2]" offers a lengthy discussion. Lynch offers little guidance on how to evaluate tours. Project LOEX (Library Orientation EXchange) has collected numerous reports on bibliographic instruction in academic libraries and various methods of library tours. This is another possible starting point in examining what kind of tours are being given.] In libraries there has been an ebb and flow through the years over what is the preferred method of such instruction. As new technology becomes available there are proponents who claim that the microcomputer medium will be the savior of library orientation. Every institution appears to be moving from something to something better in the area of library tours. As staff change, new approaches are put forth for library orientation.

The basic question however remains the same. What is an effective means of orienting students to the library's services and resources? The present experience should be evaluated before moving to a better technological solution. If librarians must introduce students to using library resources and services within certain parameters of staffing and funding then a system for doing so must be developed and shown to be effective. Despite their variety and ubiquitous nature, there is little in the professional literature dealing with the relative effectiveness of a given delivery method, let alone the effectiveness of a particular tour.

The professional literature also virtually ignores the most basic question that arises after conducting a tour: Was the tour a success? Success can be defined in many ways. For example, success may be measured in what the student has learned. The students can be tested and these test scores become the measure of success. Surveys can be given to students, seeking their opinion of what has been learned. Another way of assessing benefits would be to document the decrease in repetitive questions asked of public service staff. Within the context of the reason for a library tour, there needs to be some way of measuring its effects.

It has been questioned whether a tour of the library is the most effective means of conveying information about the library and its resources. To some educational theorists the ideal way of learning something is to experience it. Experiential learning allows students to interact with their learning environment. Theoretically, students

coming to the library would be exposed to an active learning environment. Learning how to use a library is difficult in the abstract. Some spatial arrangements need to be experienced. Therefore, the library is the best place to learn about the library's services or to explore the library resources. For example, a survey at Ohio State University showed that students uniformly were more successful in identifying a call number, a Reader's Guide citation and the purpose of the Master List of Periodicals when the instruction was presented in the library[3]. The survey compared three means of teaching these concepts: 1. assignment only, 2. class presentation, and 3. library presentation. The library presentation was consistently the most successful.

Although a library orientation conducted by a librarian may be preferred many libraries look to other means of presenting this information. A library may not have the staff or the resources to support such a labor intensive activity on the scale in which it is needed. Instructional aids such as audio tape, slides, video tape, computer programs or self-guiding handbooks sometimes are used as alternatives. These aids must be evaluated too. If well designed they can supplement the librarian. For example, the University of Nebraska-Omaha has a library orientation program in which the majority of information is presented in a classroom environment via slides and lecture, but a brief tour of the library usually follows such sessions[4]. It was noted that students were requesting such tours. In evaluating self-guided library tours being given to freshmen English courses at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln it was found that "students receiving self-paced instruction scored significantly higher on tests than those

who had received no instruction"[5]. It is helpful to be able to accommodate various student learning styles. Some students require an in-building library experience to be able to grasp how a library is spatially arranged, seeing an abstract floor plan is not enough.

Evaluating library tours can help to justify, albeit in a small way the faculty status of librarians. It is customary for an institution to evaluate course instruction. It should also be reasonable to expect services that directly impact courses such as course integrated library tours should be evaluated as well. Teaching faculty expect to have their performance evaluated; likewise librarians should be evaluated on library orientation sessions that are an integral part of formal courses. Indeed, it is helpful for course integrated library tours that they be evaluated as part of the institution's regular course evaluation process. Librarians should demonstrate their desire to improve their performance by participating in the evaluation process.

In a survey of bibliographic instruction in Illinois academic libraries it was found that "very little formal evaluation was reported"[6]. There is little evidence that library tours/orientation currently undergo any critical scrutiny. What is being accomplished in a library tour is largely unknown? Anecdotal reporting notes both positive and negative examples of library tours. From personal experience, it is rewarding to see students who have been on an orientation tour showing their friends how to use a particular service previously demonstrated or to have students return in succeeding semesters and

state how much they have used the information provided by a library tour. Documenting these examples however, is difficult to do and accomplishes little in advancing a coherent method of evaluating library tours.

DESIGNING AN EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

If library tours are to contribute to a student's overall instructional experience, they must be evaluated in a manner similar to regular course evaluations. Typically course evaluations are administered at the end of the instructional term. Library tour evaluations should be part of this evaluation process. Instructional faculty are usually willing to include a library tour evaluation form in their course evaluation procedure.

If an educational model is first examined it will help to understand where the evaluation process fits. The following is a proposed model:

A. Establish a tour objective. (What will the person have learned from taking this tour?)

B. Design the various elements of the tour.

1. Identify the audience and their special needs.

2. What will be seen on the tour?

3. What order will these elements be presented?

4. Identify required aids or handouts and prepare them.

C. Practice presenting the tour.

D. Present the tour.

E. Evaluate the tour.

It is necessary to go through these steps, particularly the identification of the tour objectives, in order to measure the effectiveness of tours. Robert Mager defines an objective as a "statement of intent that is specific"[7]. The objective should clearly state "what the learner is expected to be able to do and how you will know when he is able to it"[8]. Virginia Teifel provides an in-depth discussion of goals and objectives for bibliographic instruction programs her book, Evaluating Bibliographic Instruction; A Handbook [9]. The success of a tour is often measured by whether the person on the tour has met the tour objective. For example, a tour objective might be:

Students in the course, Introduction to Teacher Education 102, will upon

completion of a library tour, be able to locate three articles on assigned topics from professional journals with 90 percent of the students having a low level of difficulty.

A tour objective stated in this way is relatively straightforward to evaluate. It is known what is expected of the person who is being toured. Thus it is easier to quantify what they have learned from the tour. An objective should have four parts:

1. Audience. (Who will be on this tour?)

2. Behavior. (What will the person be able to do after the tour that they were not able to do before?)

3. Conditions under which the behavior takes place. (What will you do to affect the change in behavior?)

4. Measurement. (At what level will this behavior be able to be performed?)

An objective that is not so well focused will be much more difficult to evaluate. For example:

Education students will be shown periodical indexes and given directions to locate journal holdings.

This objective is not specific enough to assist in the evaluation process. Although a librarian explains a periodical index it may not by understood by the student. With the way this objective stated it is difficult to measure whether the person on the tour has gained anything from their library experience.

The design of an evaluation form will need to change over time. Standard evaluation questions are of the open-ended variety and seek input from students in the form of short answers. Some of the most constructive student responses are comments or suggestions for improvement. In such instances it is not important whether the majority of the class made similar comments, but it is significant that a response was received. Like many service professions, academic librarians take some things for granted. These questions give users of our services an opportunity to directly comment on the services' usefulness. Open-ended comments on evaluation forms allow insight into how patrons perceive services.

Over the years experience has shown that the best responses have come when the evaluation form has been kept short, usually less than ten questions. By keeping it to one-half page it is more economical and easier to duplicate. A combination of multiple choice (Likert format) questions mixed with open-ended questions have been

used. This allows for a quick response from the student and keeps to a minimum the amount of time to administer and tabulate. The Likert type questions generally relate to something specific that the tour covers. It is particularly helpful to generate statistical data and track this data over several years.

The open-ended questions frequently provide general anecdotal information. These questions take two forms: 1. What did you like or felt was most useful about the library tour? 2. What was least useful about the library tour? A typical concluding question could be, "What should the library do to better serve you?" It should not take a majority of respondents' remarks about something to make changes. Through such questions, handouts have been found to be inaccurate, workstations requiring adjustments were noted, annoying presentation mannerisms came to light, and oversize groups are only some of the topics that have been commented upon. In short, the open-ended questions provide some of the most positive ways of improving my library tours. Upper division and graduate students are particularly appreciative of the opportunity to make such constructive statements. The open-ended sections have also identified areas of the library's public service that needed attention -- for example, the need to reshelve books and periodicals more quickly. Students comments regarding the need to upgrade microform copy equipment added further support in obtaining funds to acquire new equipment.

Evaluation instruments that seek student comments may be subjective. Does the

student have the ability to determine the educational utility of the instruction? There are those who would caution against using terms like "useful" or "helpful" when preparing an evaluation form[10]. In this view students are not the most appropriate people to make these judgements. A suggested alternative to this type of value judgement is to ask the student how many times they have used a particular reference book or index[11]. The dilemma here becomes at what point does the count become significant? Or, is one student's quick referral to a book equal to another student's extended use of the same book? Utilizing statistics gathered in this fashion may pose a problem. It is helpful to remember that the tabulation of statistics is not an absolute; nor does one semester's data make or break a tour leader.

Faculty who are responsible for the course in which the library tour was given appreciate efforts to evaluate the library tours. Sharing the results of these evaluations helps them to improve "their course" as well. The instructional faculty's suggestions can be quite helpful in improving the structure of the evaluation form.

Even as a tour is being given it is possible to evaluate the presentation. Observation is no doubt the most common method of evaluation by librarians[12]. If the audience is interested and attentive, the presentation is usually considered successful. One must be discerning however, since some students, particularly certain foreign students, nod their heads in an approving gesture, all the while not understanding what is being explained. In some cultures it is not considered acceptable behavior to

question someone in authority. This situation is particularly troublesome with Japanese exchange students, who almost always nod approvingly. When questioned, however, they would not understand what was presented. One must know one's audience. As a presenter of information it is important to get feedback as the presentation is being given.

It is not recommended that evaluation of the tour be done immediately after conducting the tour. Combining the evaluation of the tour to the course evaluation at the end of the instructional term has proven far more successful. This gives an opportunity for what is presented on the tour to be put to practical use. Students respond with much more conviction if they have tried something and found it useful than if they are abstractly asked about the potential benefits to be gained sometime in the future.

The following is the basic evaluation form used at the University of Nevada, Reno in recent years:

EVALUATION FORM

Course number and title date

We are trying to evaluate the library instruction that was done this past semester.

Please answer the following questions:

low medium high

1 2 3 4 5 A. How valuable was the library instruction to the overall usefulness of this course?

1 2 3 4 5 B. What value was the computerized version of ERIC on compact disc to you?

1 2 3 4 5 C. How useful to you was the ERIC microfiche?

1 2 3 4 5 D. Were you able to locate journals easily?

E. What was the most useful part of the library instruction?

F. Did you have any difficulty using the resources or services shown on the library tour?

G. What should the library do to better serve students?

EVALUATION RESULTS

The following yearly averages represent evaluations cumulated for each calendar year. The number in parenthesis is the total student evaluation forms returned during that year.

Question A. How valuable was the library instruction to the overall usefulness of this course?

Figure 1

** Note, standard group size was approximately 25 students per library tour. In 1987 larger group sizes (25-35 students) were instructed. Groups over 20-25 students tend to have negative responses to their tour experience. In subsequent years smaller groups (less than 25 students) were toured.

Question B. What value was the computerized version of ERIC on compact disc to you?

Figure 2

** Note, in 1987 ERIC on compact disc was introduced.

Question C. How useful to you was the ERIC microfiche?

Figure 3

Question D. Were you able to locate journals easily?

Figure 4

The open-ended questions produced a wide variety of responses. They are difficult to summarize in yearly statistics. Their value is more immediate and often have proved valuable in improving future library tours.

CONCLUSION

Library tours should be evaluated. The data collected is helpful in improving the quality of bibliographic instruction presentations. It provides documentation to classroom faculty on the value of the library to their courses. In the library's overall bibliographic instructional program this data is valuable in the planning process. The

evaluation forms should be short and not very time consuming to complete. For the best results the library tour evaluations should be part of course evaluation process. "If librarians wish to gauge the impact of their program and perhaps also to justify it, they will discover a variety of ways to go about the process. A spectrum of possibilities does exist"[13]. The evaluation process is well worth the time it takes to devise the form, collect the data and tabulate the results.

NOTES

1. Mary Jo Lynch, "Library Tours: The First Step," in Educating the Library User ed. John Lubans (New York, Bowker, 1974), 254.

2. Lynch, 254-68.

3. Virginia Teifel, Ohio State University UVC 100 Library Instruction, (Syracuse: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, 1979), 23. ED 191 482.

4. Clark Hallman, Library Instruction Programs For Beginning Undergraduates, (Syracuse: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, 1980), 7. ED 188 633.

5. Scott Stebelman, Evaluation of Self-Paced Library Instruction at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, (ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, 1980), 7. ED 197 742.

6. Robert Daugherty, Bibliographic Instruction in Illinois Academic Libraries: A Survey Report, (ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, 1983), 12. ED 238 454.

7. Robert Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives (Belmont, CA: Fearon, 1975), 24.

8. Mager, 28.

9. Virginia Teifel, "Evaluating in Terms of Established Goals and Objectives," in Evaluating Bibliographic Instruction: A Handbook (Chicago: American Library Association; Association of College and Research Libraries, 1983), 23-36.

10. Richard Werking, "Evaluating Bibliographic Education: A Review and Critique," Library Trends 29 (Summer 1980): 162.

11. Werking, 162.

12. Werking, 156.

13. James Brewer, "Evaluation of Reader Instruction," Libri 26 (March 1976): 60.

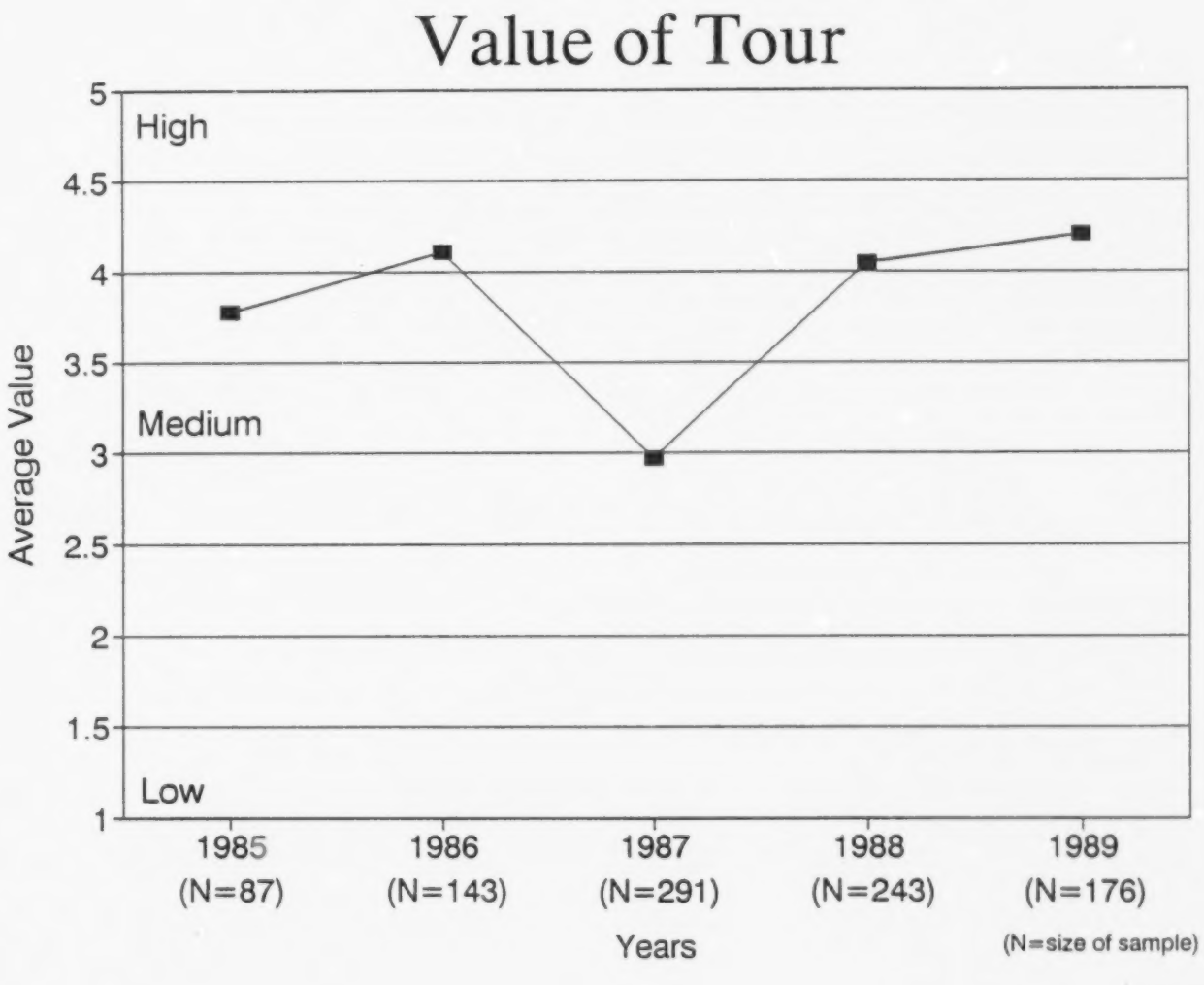
Value of Tour
Average Value
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
High
Medium
Low
1985
(N=87)
1986
(N=143)
1987
(N=291)
1988
(N=243)
1989
(N=176)
Years
(N=size of sample)

Figure #1.

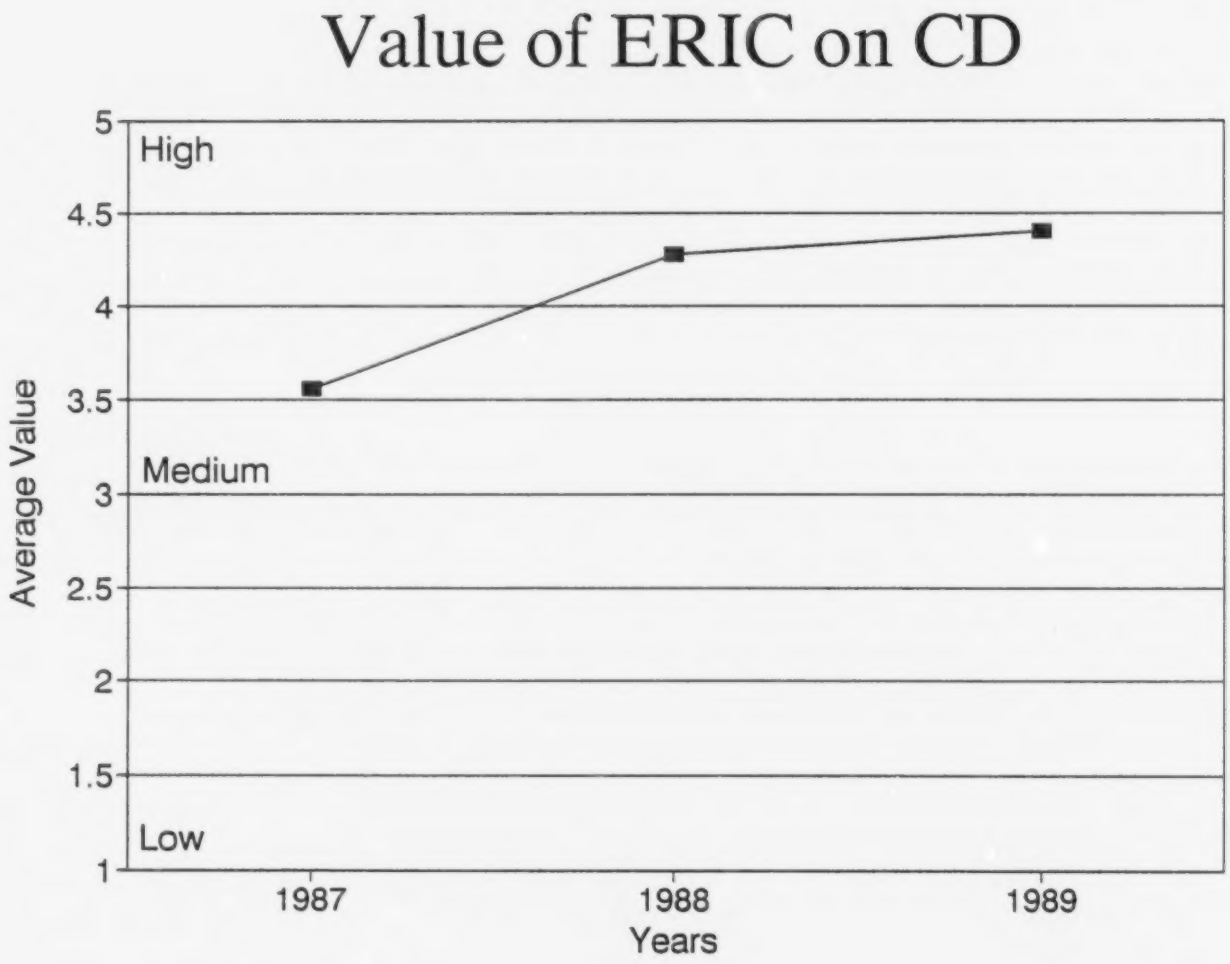
Value of ERIC on CD
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
High
Medium
Low
Average Value
1987
1988
1989
Years

Figure #2.

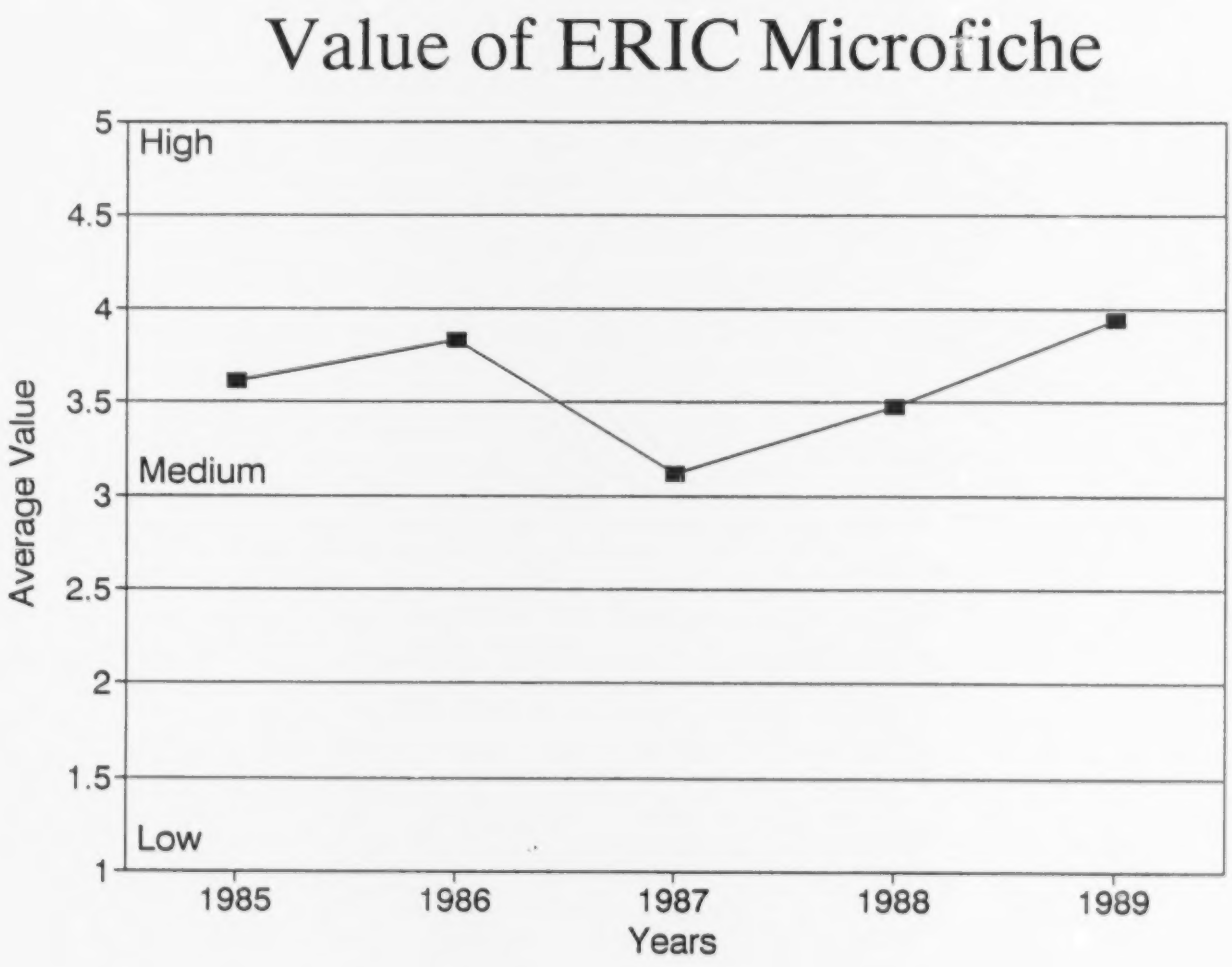
Value of ERIC Microfiche
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
High
Medium
Low
Average Value
1985
1986
1987
1988
1989
Years

Figure #3.

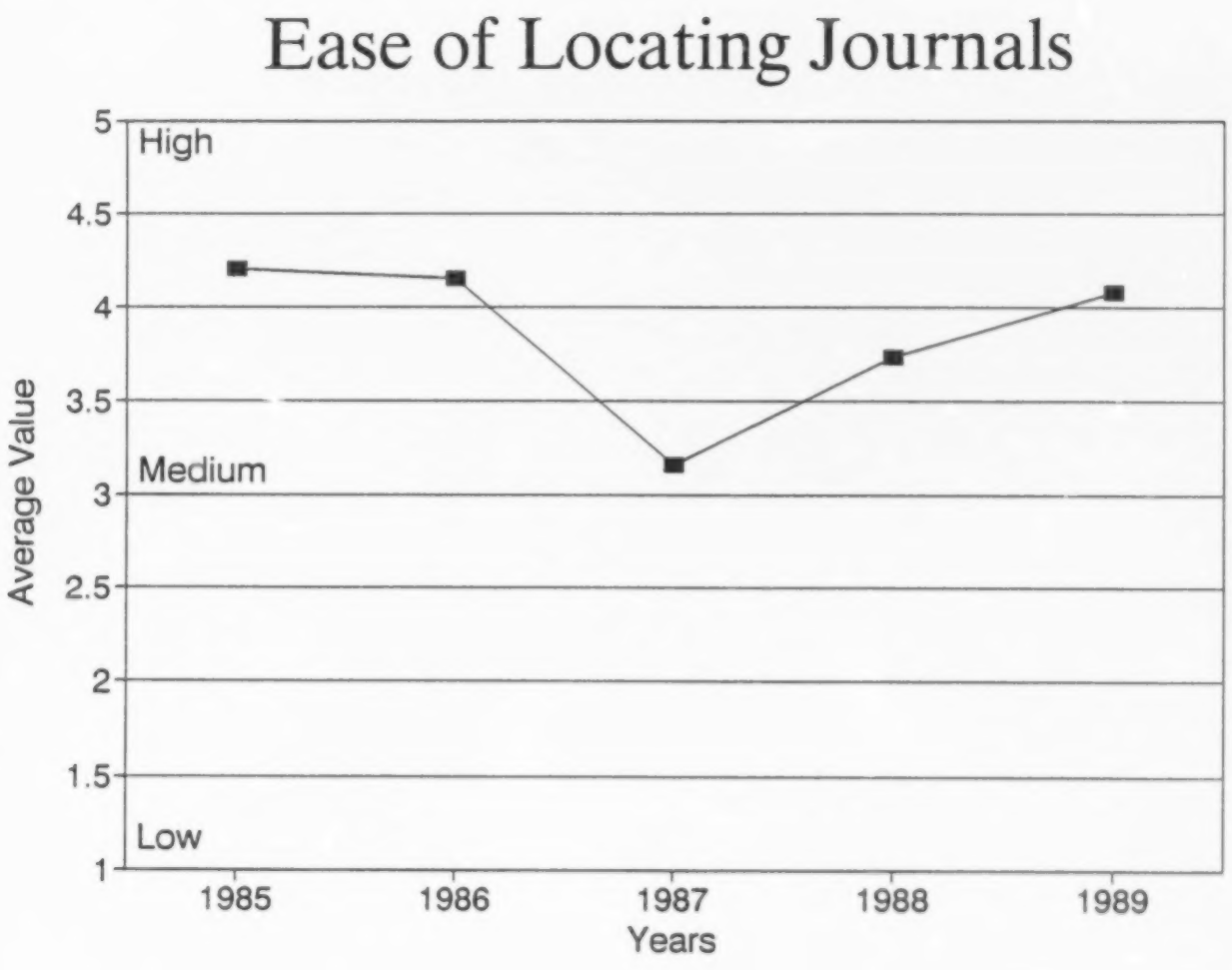
Ease of Locating Journals
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
1
High
Medium
Low
Average Value
1985
1986
1987
1988
1989
Years

Figure #4.